

NOTES ON MALAY HISTORY.

BY C. O. BLAGDEN.

I. AN EARLY REFERENCE TO MENANGKABAU.

In Chau Ju-kua's "Chu-fan-chi," translated by Hirt and Rockhill, under the heading "Palembang, San-fo-ts'i,"* p. 61, the following passage occurs:—

"There is an old tradition that the ground in this country once suddenly gaped open and out of the cavern came many myriads of cattle, which rushed off in herds into the mountains, though the people all tried to get them for food. Afterwards the crevice got stopped up with bamboo and trees and disappeared."

The editors have rightly surmised that this contains a reference to the legendary etymology of the place-name "Menangkabau,"§ in Central Sumatra. It evidently represents one of the many variant ways in which "popular etymology," as it is called, has attempted to explain this obscure name. The second half is always identified (rightly or wrongly) with the Malay word for "buffalo," but in other respects the explanations are very various. In connection with this Chinese authority, the chief point of interest is that he speaks of the legend as "an old tradition:" evidently it had been current for some time before his own date (which was about the middle of the 13th century of our era); and this goes to show that the Menangkabau country was known by that name from a considerably earlier period, that the real meaning of the name had been forgotten and there had been time for legends to grow up around it.

II. AN EARLY MENTION OF THE OLD SINGAPORE.

In Wang Ta-yüan's "Tao i chih lio" (dated 1349 A.D. and recently partially translated by Rockhill in 'T'oung Pao, March 1915), under the heading "Hsien,"† p. 100, the following passage occurs:—

"The people are much given to piracy; whenever there is an uprising in any other country, they at once embark in as many

* 三 佛 齊

§ First actually mentioned, I think, in the Nagaratretagama (A. D. 1365): see this Journal, No. 53, p. 147.

† 暹

as an hundred junks with full cargoes of sago (as food) and start off and by the vigor of their attack they secure what they want. (Thus) in recent years they came with seventy odd junks and raided Tan-ma-hsi† and attacked the city moat. (The town) resisted for a month, the place having closed its gates and defending itself, and they not daring to assault it. It happened just then that an Imperial envoy was passing by (Tan-ma-hsi), so the men of Hsien drew off and hid, after plundering Hsi-li.”‡

According to the editor, “Hsien” was Siam, and I think there is no reason to doubt that it especially referred to some part of that country adjacent to the Gulf named after it. Tan-ma-hsi was the old Singapura (see this Journal, No. 53, pp. 155-6). Assuming these identifications to be correct, as I believe we are entitled to do, the above quotation suffices to establish the fact that a naval expedition from Siam attacked Singapore in the first half of the 14th century. That is an interesting scrap of information about a period of Malay history which is otherwise almost a blank, so far as real history is concerned, though of course legends and traditions are not altogether lacking. Slight as the information is, it fits in well with what we already knew about the relations of the Siamese with the Malays of the Peninsula in this period, and it confirms the view (now pretty well established) that the old Singapore was a flourishing port during the first three quarters of the 14th century.

† 單 馬 錫

‡ 昔 里